

Economy Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2013

Present:

Councillor Green – in the Chair
Councillors Barrett, Chamberlain, Chappell, Davies, Hackett, Karney, Keegan, Ollerhead, Pritchard, Richards, Shone, Simcock, Smitheman and Stogia.

Councillor S Murphy, Deputy Leader of the Council

Jack Carney, Manchester College
Steven Flower
Laura Dyson, CityCo

Apologies

Councillors Taylor and Walters

ESC/13/13 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2013 were submitted. A member noted that the decision under minute ESC/13/09 was not clear. The Committee agreed to amend the minute to reflect who attended the meeting, and who would be invited to a future meeting.

A member asked whether there had been any progress with the recommendation on the Impact of Welfare Reform. The Chair confirmed it had not, and the Committee nominated Councillor Karney to liaise with the Deputy Leader to progress this.

Decision

1. To approve the minutes of the meetings on 6 February and 20 February 2013, subject to the amendment above.
2. To nominate Councillor Karney to liaise with the Deputy Leader on the Committee's recommendation under ESC/13/08 Impact of Welfare Reform.

ESC/13/14 The Manchester College

The Committee welcomed Jack Carney, Principal of Manchester College, to the meeting. Mr Carney told the Committee that John Thornhill, the new Chief Executive of the Manchester College had given his apologies. He gave a presentation to the Committee on the work that the College had been doing with Ofsted and other colleges to find a fairer way of measuring the outcomes for learners at further education colleges. Last time he attended a meeting of the Committee, the College had recently been inspected, and Ofsted had identified a number of improvements needed, including the quality of teaching across the provision and consistent management and accountability. He said that the Manchester College faced

particular challenges, with high levels of disadvantage and below average numeracy and literacy, although he agreed with Ofsted that these should not be excuses. Mr Carney said the Ofsted framework did not allow recognition of the good work that the Manchester College did, and that the College wanted to find a fairer way of measuring the value it brought to students. The Manchester College had begun work with other colleges in Greater Manchester and core cities to develop ways of measuring outcomes which took into account the particular circumstances of colleges like Manchester College. He told the Committee that Ofsted had provided two statisticians to work on developing these common measures for further education colleges. These measures would focus on the “value added” by colleges.

A member noted that the College had trained 30 of their staff as Ofsted observers, and asked what impact this had. Mr Carney explained that the College wanted to monitor developments in between inspections, so had 30 staff trained as accredited Ofsted observers. The aim was to have everyone working towards improvement. Some staff have needed only a small level of support, such as advice and direction in teaching. Others needed more comprehensive support, which the College has been able to provide.

A member said the impression was that Ofsted changed what it was looking for too frequently for colleges to be able to keep up. Mr Carney said that the changes to the Ofsted framework that had been introduced since the last inspection had been an improvement. He said that at the last inspection, Ofsted had only been interested in success rates, which, while important, were not everything. Under the new framework, however, Ofsted would identify areas for improvement and explain how to improve them, which was more supportive. Mr Carney also explained that the College was subject to five different inspection frameworks: four Ofsted and one the Quality Assurance Agency. He said that each framework did not take into account the other frameworks, so there was no single, overarching view of the College.

Mr Carney confirmed that the Manchester College had reduced the number of staff through voluntary severance. He said the College was currently undertaking a strategic review, the results of which would be available in April, and would be happy to return to the Committee to report the findings. The Committee agreed to this and to invite John Thornhill, the new Chief Executive of the College.

A member asked for more information on how the College was supporting digital skills and girls to take up science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Mr Carney agreed both were very important. Manchester is a hub for digital development, and it was vital that children and young people are being taught digital skills. The College has a STEM working group tasked with encouraging girls to continue with STEM subjects.

A member asked whether the Manchester College was able to continue to put resources into careers advice. Mr Carney said that for many schools and colleges the reality of changes to funding mean it is difficult to fund more than a basic provision. The Manchester College, however, is in a position to generate revenue in some parts of the organisation, some of which is invested in the careers advice provision.

A member asked for Mr Carney’s view on the main reason for the improving success

rates was. He said this was the result of lots of different actions across the organisation, but the focus on balancing inclusion with excellence is key. The College welcomes everyone, but it is vital to match students with the right course for them. He added that investment in advice and guidance is crucial.

A member noted that the last Ofsted inspection had found the College's construction provision to be inadequate, and asked what changes had been made to address this. Mr Carney said the College set up a working group which had led on this. The curriculum had changed significantly to focus on new technology, particularly sustainable technologies which will become increasingly important in the industry.

The Committee thanked Mr Carney for attending the meeting and for the information that had been provided.

Decision

To invite Jack Carney and John Thornhill to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the Manchester College's strategic review that is currently underway.

ESC/13/15 Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES)

A report of the Head of the Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES) was submitted to the Committee which provided an update on recent changes to MAES. The Committee was shown a film about a project to train volunteers to teach ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages).

The Committee discussed the project shown in the film. The Deputy Leader explained that a qualified ESOL teacher had trained the volunteers, who have then taught over 300 learners. The level of learning is pre entry, so very basic and the course does not lead to a qualification. The aim of the project was to equip a large number of people with basic skills to enable them to carry out everyday tasks. The project enables MAES to teach a lot of people for very little cost. The Head of MAES said that the intention of training volunteers was not to replace qualified ESOL teachers, and MAES ran a number of higher level courses which led to qualifications.

A member asked whether there was an adequate provision of ESOL in the city. The Head of MAES explained that the spend on ESOL accounted for approximately a third of the MAES budget, but if the whole budget was spent on MAES it would not meet the demand in the city. MAES was also bidding for funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government to deliver more ESOL training. The Committee agreed that this was vital work.

A member asked what support was available from MAES for learners accessing employment. The Head of MAES said that the emphasis in MAES was on gaining skills, not just qualifications. There were also specific programmes to assist with skills like CV writing, how to dress for interviews and how to sell yourself.

A member noted the work MAES was undertaking with the Manchester College to map out the possible routes available for learners after completing courses through MAES, and making these transparent. The member asked whether this mapping

exercise was complete, and whether there was any data available on it. The Head of MAES said that although it was not 100% complete, a great deal of work had gone into it and it was largely complete. It was also regularly refreshed. The data was not yet available, but MAES was also working on developing this. The Head of MAES said this would be made easier with the recent introduction of unique learning numbers for all learners. The Committee agreed to add an item on to its work programme to look at the progression data when this is available.

A member reminded the Committee that the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) had undertaken a review of the MAES structure and proposed various options for the future model of provision. The Deputy Leader said that the options NIACE put forward did not provide what the Council wanted. Instead, a hybrid of two or three of the options had been developed, which enabled the Council to retain direct provision with the high degree of flexibility that this allowed.

Decision

That the Committee will add an item to its work programme to look at the progression data for MAES when this is available.

ESC/13/16 Digital Skills

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted to the Committee which provided an overview of the Digital Strategy and how local residents are being supported to gain digital skills relevant to the modern labour market.

The Committee welcomed Steven Flower to the meeting. Mr Flower works on various projects which support people using technology and digital inclusion. This includes setting up Code Clubs in schools to teach children coding and working with MadLab to introduce Young Rewired State, a national initiative to support young people making apps using public data, in Manchester. Mr Flower told the Committee about Code Clubs, which are a nationwide network of volunteer led after school coding clubs for children aged 9-11.

A member asked Mr Flower how children find out about projects and what the gender balance is. Mr Flower said that the Code Clubs take place in schools and parents are key in getting children involved, particularly mothers bringing daughters. He confirmed that Code Clubs did not cost schools anything to run, as they were run by volunteers, usually an IT teacher. He said that Manchester Girl Geeks were also keen to be involved. He said that MadLab, which hosted YRS, was not really big enough for the level of interest. The Head of the Manchester Digital Development Agenda (MDDA) said that the Council was working with MadLab to identify funding for refurbishing and extending the space. He offered to provide the Committee with more information on this when it was available, which the Committee agreed to.

A member said the Council could encourage more schools to have a code club, through the influence of the local authority governor. She also suggested that the Committee support the targets of having a code club in 25% of primary schools by the end of 2014 and to engage over 100 young people in this year's Young Rewired State. The Committee agreed to this and asked the Assistant Chief Executive

(Communications, Customers and ICT) to lead on supporting these targets.

Members noted that 16% of the city's residents did not have access to the internet, and said it was likely that in poorer wards this would be much higher. The Assistant Chief Executive (Communications, Customers and ICT) urged caution over this figure. It was an estimate because internet providers would not share accurate figures with the Council until they were engaged in a procurement process. She added that members should also note that smart phones also count and these have total coverage across the city.

A member asked what the impact of library closures would be on the ability of residents to access the internet. The Deputy Leader acknowledged this was an issue as a result of the large cuts the Council needed to make, but was being taken into consideration. She said that community provision is key in mitigating the impact. The Assistant Chief Executive (Communications, Customers and ICT) said Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are doing more to provide free access for their residents. Applications for Universal Credit will be largely online, so it is in the interest of RSLs to ensure that their residents are able to access and use IT. The Head of the MDDA added that some RSLs are piloting digital libraries, which had additional PCs and laptops in community spaces. Some RSLs were also aiming to train all front line staff as digital champions.

A member asked whether the Council could support organisations such as Manchester Girl Geeks in accessing funding to support the development of digital skills. The Interim Head of Regeneration said that there may be funding available through Manchester Adult Education Service (MAES) and would make enquiries with the Head of MAES.

The Committee welcomed the report, and supported the work that was taking place on the citywide and Greater Manchester levels. Members felt that it was important to also determine what activity was taking place on a local level and that ward coordination should undertake an exercise to map this.

Decision

1. To request that the Head of the Manchester Digital Development Agency provide the Committee with an update on creating more capacity at MadLab, when this is available.
2. To recommend that the Council uses its influence through local authority governors to encourage primary schools to have a code club.
3. To support the targets to have a code club in 25% of primary schools by the end of 2014 and to engage over 100 young people in this year's Young Rewired State. To request that the Assistant Chief Executive (Communications, Customers and ICT) to lead on supporting these targets.
4. To request that the Interim Head of Regeneration investigate whether the Council can support groups such as Manchester Girl Geeks to access funding.

5. To recommend that ward coordination carry out a mapping exercise to determine what activity related to promoting digital skills is taking place on a local level.

ESC/13/17 Christmas 2012 Summary

The Committee considered a report which provided a summary of the economy in Manchester during Christmas 2012. The report described the activity promoted by the Council, which included the Christmas markets, lighting, events and a communications campaign and the impact these had on the economy. The Committee welcomed Laura Dyson of CityCo to the meeting.

The Committee welcomed the report and the information it contained. Members recognised that Manchester was performing very well, and the investment in the campaign was crucial. Members said they would have liked more information on district centres, what they offer and how the Council supports them. The Assistant Chief Executive (Communications, Customers and ICT) said the focus of this report was on the city centre, and there was a significant difference in the work that went on to promote the city centre to the work on district centres. She said although the Council did support district centres, resources for this were limited and communities needed to lead on the work themselves. The city centre campaign was on a national level. The Interim Head of Regeneration said that the Christmas offer in district centres varied across the city and the district centre plans were key in underpinning the work to improve this. A member urged the Committee that it was also the responsibility of local councillors consider what they could do on a local level to support the Christmas offer.

A member noted that the communications campaign included a large number of printed calendars, leaflets and press inserts, and asked whether the effectiveness justified this, given the environmental implications. The Assistant Chief Executive (Communications, Customers and ICT) reassured the Committee that she was fully aware of the environmental concerns and all leaflets used recycled paper and vegetable dyes. She never approved a leaflet unless she was sure it was effective. She said that a successful campaign relied on different layers of communication, from reaching people through the television and radio to within their own homes. These different layers reinforce each other and make a campaign more successful than one layer alone would. But she emphasised that the Council does limit what is produced physically.

The Committee discussed the Christmas Markets and what the Council did to support traders. The Assistant Chief Executive (Communications, Customers and ICT) explained the Council did support independent traders to take up positions in the market, such as Afflecks Palace. The Council also worked with schools and the creative industries.

A member asked whether the private sector contributed to the costs at all, given how much they benefit from the investment. The Assistant Chief Executive (Communications, Customers and ICT) said that this was beginning to happen, thanks to the partnership and joint working with CityCo.

A member asked how Manchester compared with other major cities. The Assistant Chief Executive (Communications, Customers and ICT) said that, although they did not have detailed information available, Manchester compared well. Nationally, sales were down, but in Manchester they were up. Ms Dyson told the Committee that CityCo were commissioning some new research on this, to compare Manchester with other major cities in terms of footfall and sales figures. This would enable the Council and CityCo to compare trends.

The Committee welcomed the report and agreed that it would be worthwhile to have this as an annual update on the work programme. Members asked that future reports include more on district centres and comparison with other major cities.

Decision

To request that this item is added to the work programme as an annual report to the Committee. To request that future reports include more on district centres and comparison with other major cities.

ESC/13/18 Economic Improvements by Ward – Impact on Residents Lives

The Committee considered a report of the Interim Head of Regeneration and the Business Planning and Performance Manager which provided new information on the economic changes on a ward level based on Census 2011 data that had recently been released.

The Committee discussed some issues with the data available, including using both 16-64 and 16-74 as groupings and counting the number of degrees in 16-74 year olds when almost no 16-21 year olds will have a degree yet. The Business Planning and Performance Manager agreed, but explained that this is how the data has been released. Once further breakdown of data is available, the detail would be clarified. The Committee asked for a further report back when more detail was available.

The Committee also noted that what appear to be significant improvements may actually be changes to the demographic in a ward, for example, more young people moving to Ancoats and Clayton accounting for the higher proportion of people with degrees.

Decision

To request a further report when more detailed information is available.

ESC/13/19 Overview Report

Decision

To agree the Committee's work programme and delegate to the Chair any further amendments.